**Tips for making the move to online assessments**

**Experts offer advice and support as 2014 testing goal nears**

tips-for-making-the-move-to-online-assessments

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[](http://www.eschoolnews.com/files/2012/01/TestingDeadline.jpg)

Online assessments will provide a more detailed look at student ability, stakeholders say.

As states move toward implementing online assessments in 2014, a panel of experts agreed that school technology leaders must ensure that districts have the capacity, manpower, and foresight to see that the transition is a successful one.

Online assessments present a handful of concerns for school technology leaders, said Ray Eernisse, chief information officer for Missouri’s Francis Howell School District, and Daniel Honore, director of information services for Wisconsin’s Kenosha Unified School District.

Eernisse and Honore were part of a Jan. 17 Consortium for School Networking webinar panel that addressed how preparing for these assessments can help set the school technology agenda and make network development a top priority for the future of teaching and learning.

**Hardware**: “We can never have enough hardware, it seems,” said Eernisse. The configuration, age, and availability of hardware all play a role in the move to online assessments. Environmental concerns include whether the seating and lighting is comfortable for test-takers.

**Software**: School technology staff must ensure that devices are able to run testing software and that they have the latest version of necessary products. Additional licensing requirements might exist, along with the need to download plug-ins such as flash or java.

**Network**: “Bandwidth is probably the most prevalent” concern, said Honore. Testing facilities must have enough bandwidth in testing rooms and in the facilities overall. Students should have access to any and all resources they might need during testing, and security must be capable of handling confidential information.

**Tech support**: “Make sure you have enough to respond to any issues students or staff may have,” Honore said.

**Testing**: Although online assessments are intended to be more revealing and easier in some aspects, they still will require staff time. Testing environments should discourage cheating and be arranged in a way to minimize cheating opportunities.

The Race to the Top Assessment Program has awarded funding to two consortia of states to support the development of high-stakes, computer-based assessments that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

In 2010, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) [received a total of $330 million](http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/09/02/states-given-millions-for-new-assessments/) to develop such assessments. But some education leaders [have expressed concerns](http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/11/29/with-online-testing-on-the-horizon-infrastructure-could-be-a-challenge/) about the school technology infrastructure that will be necessary to deliver the tests online.

The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) is working with PARCC and SBAC on issues of school technology readiness and launched a website, [Assess4ed.net](http://assess4ed.net/), to help schools address the transition, said SETDA Executive Director Doug Levin.

“By moving testing online, it guarantees that technology will be pervasive in schools and classrooms and can be used for learning all year,” he said.

In creating a smarter system of assessments, technology must be used to the maximum extent feasible to develop, administer, score, and report on results, Levin said. Online assessments also will enable new and innovative item types that capture complex student learning, such as sections that test critical thinking and problem solving and move beyond multiple-choice questions. The system also will adhere to common interoperability standards.

As PARCC and SBAC collaborate to build an online, interactive school technology readiness tool to support technology transitions and implementation, they will work to evaluate states’ and schools’ current technology infrastructure and their readiness to implement a system of online assessments. The tool also will support technology planning and implementation.

**A roadmap to 2014**

“Over 90 percent of statewide tests today are still given in a manner that would be recognizable by a student from 40 years ago,” said Bryan Bleil, vice president of Online and Technology Implementation, Assessment, and Information with Pearson.

Bleil is working with Pearson customers as they move from paper-based statewide assessments to computer-based testing, and he said the promise of next-generation assessments is their “ability to leverage technology for a richer assessment of a student’s understanding and knowledge on a topic.”

Online assessments also offer alternatives for students with special needs and can be turned around quicker than traditional assessments, which are mailed to scoring centers.

Pearson’s [Roadmap to 2014](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/pai/ai/Products/NextGeneration/Roadmap.htm%20) outlines five key steps in a successful transition to online assessments:

* Conduct a needs analysis.
* Develop a realistic transition strategy and plan: Ideally, districts will implement a multi-year transition and not attempt to flip a switch and convert all schools at once, Bleil said.
* Ensure interoperability: Strong engagement between the assessment community and technology community is especially critical.
* Communicate proactively: Assessment personnel, technology personnel, and administrators should communicate openly and often for the smoothest transition.
* Anticipate ongoing change: “States need to expect that as they move off of paper and pencil, they’re moving onto a platform that is itself always changing,” Bleil said.

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